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WASHINGTON POST  
12 October 1986

# Daniloff Forgot A Reporter Can't Do His Country a Favor

By Dusko Doder

**T**HE NICHOLAS DANILOFF case contains an important but little-noted lesson for the press: in a place like Moscow, doing a favor for the U.S. Embassy can get you in big trouble.

It's clear now that Nick Daniloff wasn't a spy. It is equally clear that he was used by the CIA station in Moscow, which was seeking to establish contact with a potential intelligence source, a supposedly dissident priest named "Father Roman." Like many other American correspondents, Daniloff felt he was doing a helpful thing by delivering a letter from Father Roman addressed to the U.S. Embassy and subsequently giving CIA operatives Father Roman's telephone number.

Daniloff believes now that he made a mistake. He's right. He did. A reporter shouldn't get involved—even briefly and indirectly, as Daniloff did—in intelligence gathering. His mistake was compounded by the CIA's clumsy handling of the case, which gave the KGB what it regarded as evidence of Daniloff's involvement in American espionage.

In a place like Moscow, an American reporter must carry a white flag, making it abundantly clear that he has nothing to do with any government, including his own. As a practical matter, Moscow correspondents must do so for their own protection and the protection of their Soviet friends and contacts. They must also uphold the professional standards that make the American press so different from the Kremlin's government-controlled media.

Daniloff is not the first American correspondent to make such a mistake. Having served as a correspondent in Moscow for more than seven of the past 18 years, I know several colleagues who have made similar mistakes. I made such mistakes myself.

It was one such mistake that brought me into my first serious encounter with the KGB.

In August 1983 I wrote a story about a secret study of Soviet economic problems. The Novosibirsk paper, as the document came to be known, was printed in seventy numbered copies. I had obtained a copy of it in April 1983 from an aide to one of the leading Kremlin personalities. It revealed the tone and substance of the internal debates on economic reforms.

The paper was written by Tatyana Zaslavskaya, a member of the Academy of Sciences and a prominent member of the Novosibirsk group of economic reformers. This and other papers contending that the existing system itself was the main reason for declining Soviet economic performance were distributed to the offices of top officials.

My story created a minor stir in the West. Almost instantly I had the feeling that the police were closing in on me. I sensed it everywhere, inside our compound and driving around Moscow. My telephones began to act up. The police guard inside our compound rushed to his booth when he saw me coming out of my office.

I had anticipated all this and had kept the document hidden for four months before writing the story because I knew that would make it harder for the KGB to discover my source. For the same reason, I had not mentioned in my story the author of the document or the fact that it came from the Novosibirsk branch of the Academy of Sciences.

Looking back, I now feel that I made one mistake, which may have raised the KGB's suspicions. Back in

April, when I first obtained the document, I had shown it to a few trusted colleagues to get their views.

My mistake, I think, was that I had also given a copy to a friend at the U.S. Embassy. I had not thought through the consequences of such a move. Looking back, I must have felt that it was important that somebody in the American government be aware of its contents in order to assess the changes contemplated by the new Soviet leadership.

It never occurred to me at that point that I was doing something improper and potentially self-incriminating, that I was supplying information to the U.S. government before I had written a story for my newspaper. All too frequently in Moscow we tended to view the world in simple terms—*us* and *them*—and the instinct to go with our pack was occasionally so strong that it overruled judgment and experience.

The Soviets may have gotten suspicious on August 3, 1983. With my story causing something of a one-day sensation, I was being besieged by phone calls and visits from foreign diplomats and correspondents who wanted to know more about my scoop. The only people who failed to phone and seek additional details were the American diplomats at the Moscow embassy.

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In the claustrophobic world of Moscow, where we were under fairly close police scrutiny most of the time, the conspicuous lack of American interest may inadvertently have signalled the KGB that the U.S. Embassy already had this particular document. This, in turn, meant either that I had already given it to the embassy or that the embassy had leaked it to me in order to embarrass the Soviet Union.

In either case, my role seemed dubious. I decided that day never again to give any confidential information to U.S. officials in Moscow.

The KGB pressure was palpable. A Soviet journalist friend hinted to me over drinks at the Press Club that I was suspected of having espionage connections—to which I gave the standard reply, a series of four-letter words.

I had been the recipient of several leaks before August 1983—one or two of those containing extremely embarrassing information. Yet this incident with the Novosibirsk paper created more problems for me than any other action, perhaps because it reinforced Soviet suspicions that American journalists would share valuable information with the U.S. embassy.

That, it seems to me, was Danilo's problem too. Except that his actions seem to have assumed even more sinister proportions in the minds of KGB counter-intelligence officials.

**H**e had arrived in Moscow as U.S. News & World Report correspondent in 1981. By late 1984, Danilo explained to me this week, he became aware of police efforts to entrap him.

In December 1984, Danilo was approached by a Russian Orthodox priest, Father Roman, "a charming, wonderful fellow who was extraordinarily pleasant." He was, Danilo said, the type of "guy who would be interesting to get to know."

Father Roman had phoned Danilo, then stopped by his office, something that was possible since Danilo's office was located in a building that was not guarded by police, as are most other foreigners' compounds in Moscow. Danilo suggested they take a walk and they walked for about one hour. Father Roman told Danilo that he had served a term in a labor camp on a trumped-up charge of stealing icons.

Danilo took Father Roman's phone number. There was one thing that made Danilo wonder about his new contact. He asked him how he had obtained the number for the U.S. News & World Report bureau in Moscow, a reasonable question since there is no telephone book in the Soviet capital.

Father Roman's answer was curious, although not entirely implausible, Danilo recalled. He said that he had a friend who had a friend that worked as a secretary in the press department of the Foreign Ministry.

A month later, Danilo said, he received a call from Father Roman, who informed him that he would send Danilo "some material about young people and the Russian Orthodox Church." The next day, Jan. 22, 1985, Danilo found a letter addressed to him in his mailbox. When he opened it, he found inside another envelope addressed to U.S. Ambassador Arthur Hartman.

Danilo took the letter to the U.S. Embassy. It contained yet another interior envelope addressed to William Casey, the CIA director. When it was opened at the embassy, Danilo said, it appeared that the contents "contained information of interest to the CIA." The letter was handwritten, Danilo said, and he could not read the handwriting.

A month later Danilo was called to the embassy by a senior political officer and taken to the "glass house," as the secure room designed to thwart electronic surveillance is called. They were joined there by another diplomat who Danilo quickly understood to be the CIA station chief. He was asked details about Father Roman. The only thing Danilo could provide, he said, was the priest's phone number.

A few weeks later a curious thing happened. State Department analysts had reached the conclusion that Father Roman was a bogus priest and in effect a KGB plant. The CIA, however, continued to maintain active interest in Father Roman. When Danilo was called again to the embassy and taken to the "glass house," he was advised by a U.S. diplomat friend that the State Department believed the contact with the priest was a KGB trap. "My advice to you is to be very careful," the diplomat said. After that warning, Danilo completely disassociated himself from the Father Roman case.

Why did Danilo provide Father Roman's phone number to the CIA? With the benefit of hindsight, it's clear that a journalist is treading on perilous ground when he helps intelligence operatives make contact with a potential intelligence source. Yet the request made in the "glass house" seemed harmless and inconsequential. Danilo explained: "How could I say no, I don't want to give you the phone number?"

What Danilo did not expect was that the CIA would be so sloppy, that his role in the affair would be mentioned in two communications a CIA operative subsequently had with the bogus priest, a letter and a phone call. When he was arrested in Moscow last Aug. 30, Danilo was confronted by his KGB interrogator with a letter from a CIA officer to the bogus priest introducing himself as a "friend of Nikolai."

Undoubtedly, this was a blow to Danilo's confidence. Inside the Lefortovo prison, Danilo said, he adopted the position of "minimal cooperation" with the KGB. He signed the protocols of interrogation, but registered his dissent. And he regretted his original decision to deliver the letter to Hartman.

"If I knew then what I know now," said Danilo, "I would have burned that letter."

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